

## **A Mechanism Linking Discrimination, Conflict, and Switching Behaviour in Bicultural Individuals**

JungHui Lee, Kanagawa Dental University Yokosuka, Japan  
Tomoko Tanaka, Okayama University, Japan

### **Abstract**

This study focuses on the switching behaviour exhibited by *Zainichi Koreans* (ethnic Koreans living in Japan who have effectively managed to maintain their Korean nationality and have been granted the status of *tokubetsu eijusha* [“special” permanent residents] by the Japanese government). In the present article, the term “switching” refers to the alteration of behaviour according to different cultural contexts. This study aimed to identify the mechanism underlying links between perceived discrimination, internal conflict, and switching. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 184 Zainichi Koreans. Path analyses showed that discrimination had a significant effect on conflict ( $\beta = .31, p < .001$ ), and that conflict enhanced switching significantly ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ). In addition, discrimination directly exerted a significant, positive effect on switching ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ). These findings suggest that switching may ultimately be caused by discrimination on the part of the host’s majority society or individuals. This study’s findings contribute to the theory that switching is a way for immigrants to protect themselves if they perceive discrimination from – or feel conflicted toward – the society in which they live.

*Keywords:* bicultural individuals, conflict, discrimination, Japan, switching, Zainichi Koreans

## Introduction

Increasingly, individuals are moving between countries due to the modern conveniences of the international travel system and the contemporary socioeconomic climate of globalization, both of which have contributed significantly to the growing numbers of immigrants worldwide. These individuals are regarded as bicultural or multicultural people, who “switch” their behaviour as they move between different cultures (van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015).

In Japan, there is an ethnic group of so-called *Zainichi Koreans*, most of whose ancestors came to the country during the Japanese colonial period between 1910 and 1945 (Fukuoka, 1993). The vast majority of Zainichi Koreans migrated from the Korean peninsula to Japan before 1945 (Harajiri, 1989). Lee (2011) mentions that, up until the present, there have been five generations of Zainichi Koreans. The term “Zainichi Korean” implies that these people are maintaining their Korean nationality (they possess only a Korean passport) and that they live in Japan as *tokubetsu ejusha* (“special” permanent residents) – a category that is differentiated from *ipan ejusha* (“general” permanent residents). The legal status of *tokubetsu ejusha* applies to a social category of immigrant communities, such as the Zainichi Koreans, which originated as settlements of ethnic non-Japanese citizens of the former Japanese empire, whereas the *ipan ejusha* did not arrive during the Japanese colonial period. Some Zainichi Koreans have acquired Japanese citizenship; this process entails giving up their Korean nationality and thus becoming legitimate Japanese citizens. Within this category, Tani (2002) included those who – even though they became Japanese citizens through naturalization – still maintained some emotional ties, to some degree, with the Korean peninsula. Although Zainichi Koreans are usually sorted into two groups in accordance with their ethnicity and their affiliation with either North or South Korea, we limit the present study’s population to those holding a South Korean passport and citizenship. Therefore, in the current study, we define those who maintain their Korean nationality and have *tokubetsu ejusha* status in Japan (including those who became Japanese citizens through naturalization) as Zainichi Koreans. In addition, we treat Zainichi Koreans as a group of immigrants, following the previous perspectives outlined by Tani (2002).

Zainichi Koreans could be considered multicultural individuals, in that they have more than one internalized culture (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Previous research has demonstrated the existence of switching behaviour among multicultural individuals toward both the root-ethnic and the host culture: Schindler, Reinhard, Knab, and Stahlberg (2016) argue that such multicultural individuals spontaneously switch their behaviour between these cultural contexts. It has been reported that such switching behaviour exists among the Zainichi Koreans in particular. For instance, Fukuoka (1993) reported narratives from interviews with young adult Zainichi Koreans, such as a participant who declared that “I feel there are two aspects to myself. I am a Japanese person when I interact with Japanese people (with a sense of myself as never differentiated from the Japanese), and I am a real Korean when I interact with my fellow Koreans. I think I separate the Japanese self from the Korean self.” Fukuoka (1993) uses such narratives to argue for the development among Zainichi Koreans of a “switching mechanism”. Although previous sociological literature suggests that switching behaviour may exist among Zainichi Korean young adults, the background context for why they tend to shift behaviour patterns according to their conversation partner’s ethnicity or the conversation context has not been empirically established.

In the current article, *switching* refers to the alteration of a person's behaviours according to different situational or cultural contexts. This study proceeds with a focus on the switching behaviour of Zainichi Koreans. It seeks to identify their switching mechanisms based on an explication of specific factors that are linked to switching. Finally, perspectives derived from this study's findings could help to deepen Zainichi Koreans' self-understanding regarding their way of existence, and it could provide them with some sense of ease regarding their complicated situation, one in which they constantly shift between different cultural contexts.

Schindler et al. (2016) state that bicultural individuals simultaneously possess conflicting meaning systems, and therefore switch behavioural patterns according to different situational or cultural contexts. On the other hand, in discussing the adverse effects of switching – as compared to the abovementioned perspectives – van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez (2015) point out that switching could spur such internal conflicts because alternating their behaviour between the root culture and the host culture is stressful for bicultural individuals. In short, whether conflict precedes switching or switching leads to conflict is not clear. Therefore, the present study posits two directions for the hypothesized models – one moves from conflict to switching, and the other moves from switching to conflict – and elucidates which of these hypothesized models presents a good fit for the sample data.

Im (2001) argues that Zainichi Koreans switch between their Korean and Japanese names to avoid discrimination from the host majority population, which produces the hypothesis that discrimination promotes switching. In relation to discrimination, we hypothesized that the increase in the Zainichi Koreans' age range would correlate with additional reports of perceived discrimination. This could be because, after World War II, Japanese society was exclusive and discriminatory toward aliens due to their "different pedigree" (Lee, 2011). As mentioned above, most of the Zainichi Koreans emigrated from the former Japanese colonies prior to 1945; thus, the older Zainichi Koreans experienced Japanese society's discriminatory attitude toward foreigners. Furthermore, we anticipated that the experience of discrimination would enhance participants' feelings of internal conflict because many Zainichi Koreans feel torn between two nations. This happens even after acquiring Japanese citizenship through naturalization (which entails giving up their Korean nationality) due to the Japanese society's history of discrimination against the Zainichi Koreans (Mori, 2002).

In addition, it was expected that the older a Zainichi Korean, the more likely they would be to switch between different cultural contexts. That is, an older Zainichi Korean interacting with fellow Koreans will act "Korean" in terms of behaviour and, while engaging with Japanese people, the same Zainichi Korean will modify behaviour to fit a more "Japanese" behavioural style. This behaviour may be the result of Japanese society's strong emphasis on homogeneity and the suppression of Zainichi Koreans' cultural heritage under the Japanese empire – during which period many of the presently older Zainichi individuals lived (Tsujimoto et al., 1994). In this type of migratory context, Zainichi Koreans should be expected to employ switching behaviour to "survive", cordoning off their ethnic heritage from the host majority culture in response to different cultural contexts.

## Goals and Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to elucidate the mechanism of switching in relation to the specific conflicts and discrimination experienced by Zainichi Koreans, who constitute an ethnic minority in the host Japanese society. The findings and the insights drawn from the case of Zainichi Koreans in Japan could help to build a better relationship between the ethnic

Zainichi Koreans and the host Japanese population. By identifying the factors that underlie Zainichi Koreans' adoption of switching behaviour, an understanding concerning the background context of the Zainichi Koreans' switching could be facilitated between the two groups. Furthermore, this foundation of mutual understanding could be related to a feeling of shared kindness or tolerance.

The study hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Zainichi Koreans who are older report higher levels of discrimination.

H2: Zainichi Koreans who are older are more likely to switch.

H3: Discrimination increases feelings of conflict.

H4: Discrimination exerts a positive effect on switching.

We present two hypothetical models below. Model 1 links discrimination to conflict and then to switching (Figure 1), whereas Model 2 links discrimination to switching and thereby to conflict (Figure 2). Age is included in both these proposed models. We elucidate below which is a better fit for the data.

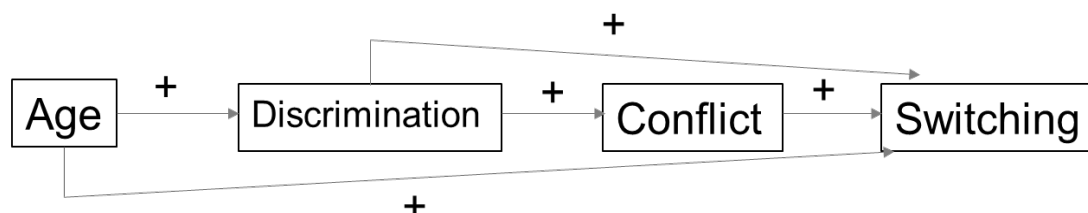


Figure 1: Model 1, with a link from discrimination to conflict, and thereby to switching

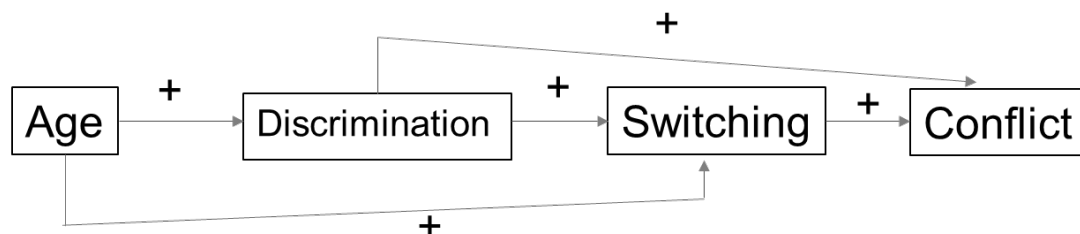


Figure 2: Model 2, with a link from discrimination to switching, and thereby to conflict

## Methods

### Sample and Data Collection

Respondents were 184 Zainichi Koreans (93 men and 91 women). We used two sources to generate our sample. First, participants were recruited with the assistance of the Okayama *Mindan* (South Korean Residents' Union in Japan), which holds an event on the 15th of August each year to memorialize and celebrate Japan's release of the Korean Peninsula (colonized 1910–1945). The first author visited this event and distributed 200 questionnaires; of these, 107 responses (54%) were obtained. Mindan staff repeatedly made announcements requesting event attendees' cooperation with the survey. Second, data were gathered with the

assistance of the Mindan in Osaka, which is geographically close to Okayama. Questionnaires and prepaid return envelopes were distributed via mail. Of the 200 questionnaires sent to the Osaka Mindan, 77 (39%) were returned.

Regarding ethical considerations, the purpose of this study was explained in a document accompanying the questionnaire, and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information and responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation was anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire was administered in Japanese.

### Measures

All items were measured using Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Switching.** This measure consisted of 9 items (Appendix 1) concerning shifting or changing interpersonal behaviours depending on the respondent's current situation or companions. Items were selected based on the Switching Scale developed by Lee and Tanaka (2017a). An example item is "I conform more to the behaviour of others when I am with Japanese people than when with fellow Koreans." In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .86.

**Conflict.** Conflict was measured using 4 items (Appendix 2) on the Conflict Scale developed by Lee and Tanaka (2017b), which evaluates the experience of feeling psychologically torn between two cultures or groups. An example item is "I do not feel that I can completely identify with either Korean or Japanese ethnicity". In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .64.

**Discrimination.** Based on Berry and Sabatier's (2010) study, we generated one question to examine perceived discrimination from the host majority population: "Japanese people discriminate against me because I am Zainichi Korean".

**Demographic variables.** Questions about the participants' background information, such as gender, age, nationality, and the number of generations (as Zainichi Koreans) their family had been in the country, were included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, to explore Zainichi Koreans' actual lives between the two cultures, two questions were asked, with four response options (Japanese, Korean, both, or neither), following Ward (2006): "Which lifestyle are you familiar with?" and "Are you fluent in the Korean or Japanese language?"

### Data Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software version 20.0 was used for descriptive analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and correlation analysis, to confirm underlying assumptions for path analysis. Path analysis was performed using AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structure) 20.0 to test relationships among variables included in the proposed model.

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

Almost all participants (92.4%) were second-, third-, or fourth-generation immigrants, and most (93.5%) had retained their ethnic Korean nationality. Proportions of men (50.5%) and women (49.5%) were similar, and they were aged between 20 and 83, with a mean age of

47.6 years ( $SD = 16.9$  years). To the question “Which lifestyle are you familiar with?” slightly less than two-thirds (63.9%) selected Japanese, rather few (5.0%) selected Korean, about one-third (29.5%) reported familiarity with both Korean and Japanese lifestyles, and very few (1.6%) selected neither. In response to the item “Are you fluent in the Korean or Japanese language?” almost all the participants reported fluency in Japanese (95.1%), very few (1.6%) were fluent in Korean, and a few (3.3%) were fluent in both Korean and Japanese.

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables are shown in Table 1. Pearson’s correlation analysis showed that switching was significantly and positively correlated with older age ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), higher levels of perceived discrimination ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), and greater feelings of conflict ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). Discrimination had a significant and positive association with older age and greater levels of conflict ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ;  $r = .32, p < .01$ ), respectively.

	variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4
1	Age	47.55	16.89	.21 **	.29 **	.03
2	Discrimination	1.87	0.92		.37 **	.32 **
3	Switching	2.95	0.77			.33 **
4	Conflict	2.41	0.84			

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlation analysis results

### Path Analysis Results for Discrimination, Conflict, and Switching

To illustrate which of the hypothesized models (Model 1: discrimination exerts an effect on switching and thereby leads to conflict; Model 2: there is a link from discrimination to conflict, which in turn is linked to switching) provided a good fit to the sample data, path analysis was conducted. A comparison between the two proposed models showed the hypothesized Model 2, with a link from discrimination to conflict and then to switching, had a lower AIC fit index, indicating that it fit better than Model 1. Comparison of the goodness-of-fit statistics for the two models is shown in Table 2.

Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	AIC	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Model 1	1.91	1	.17	19.91	1.00	0.95	0.07
Model 2	4.98	1	.03	22.98	0.99	0.86	0.15

*Note.* AIC = Akaike information criterion; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

Table 2: Goodness-of-fit indices for the two proposed models

Figure 3 shows the final empirical model adopted in our analysis, which exhibited good fit to the sample data:  $\chi^2 = 1.91$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .17$ . Additional fit indices, the GFI (goodness-of-fit index) and AGFI (adjusted goodness-of-fit index), were greater than 0.90. Furthermore, the

RMSEA (root-mean-square error of approximation) was less than 0.50. Explained variances ( $R^2$ s) for this model were .04, .10, and .25 for discrimination, conflict, and switching, respectively.

As shown in Figure 3, older age, greater feelings of conflict, and higher levels of discrimination were directly associated with higher switching scores ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = .25, p < .001$ , respectively). Discrimination had a significant effect on conflict ( $\beta = .31, p < .001$ ), and conflict enhanced switching significantly ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ). These findings indicate that greater perceived discrimination caused internal conflict, which, in turn, led participants to feel uncomfortable with their position “in between” their ethnic Korean and the host Japanese cultures or groups; this, in turn, led to changes in their behavioural patterns according to the situation.

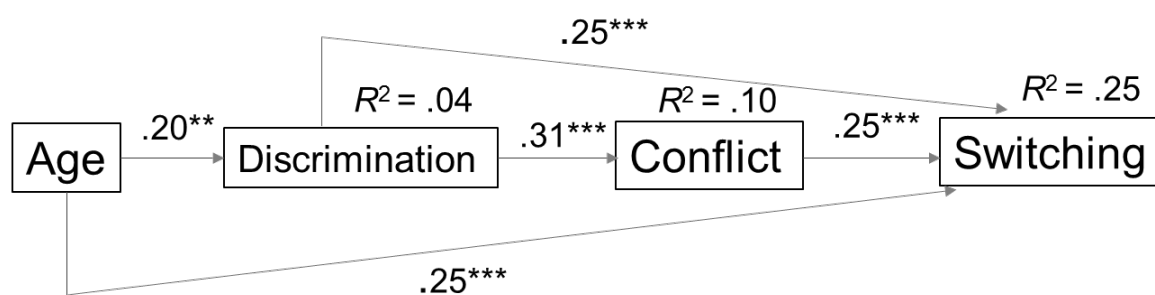


Figure 3: Empirical model of the relationships between discrimination, conflict, and switching. All paths are significant and standardized. \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Discussion

This study aimed to clarify the mechanisms linking discrimination, conflict, and switching among Zainichi Koreans. As a result of the path analysis, the model positing a link from discrimination to conflict and in turn to switching (Model 2) was a better fit to the sample data than the model positing a link from discrimination to switching and thereby to conflict (Model 1). In addition, discrimination exerted a significantly positive effect on switching. Thus, Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 were supported.

From these results, we conclude that there are two paths that underlie switching. First, those who perceive greater discrimination experience more conflict between two cultures or groups and, therefore, switch behavioural patterns to resolve this conflict. Past sociological studies suggest that there could be a switching behaviour phenomenon existent among Zainichi Koreans. However, thus far, there has been no empirical establishment of how switching behaviour is promoted, that is, the processes involved in switching including the variables related to switching behaviour.

The current study's results help clarify the nature of the mechanism linking discrimination to conflict and thereby to switching, which is an observed phenomenon among Zainichi Koreans in their current life-context. This is empirically established in our questionnaire survey. Second, based on our results, which showed that discrimination directly exerted a positive effect on switching, we speculate that Zainichi Koreans may employ switching behaviour strategies to deal with discrimination from their host society or population. In a similar vein, Hong, Zhan, Morris, and Benet-Martínez (2016) argue that multicultural

individuals employ a switching strategy to counter discrimination by a host majority society or individuals.

In sum, our findings suggest that, for the participants in the present study, the ultimate cause of switching may be higher levels or perceived levels of discrimination from the host majority society or individuals. In other words, the study findings could not attribute switching to a sense of “belonging” for either the ethnic or the host categories. Rather, Zainichi Koreans’ probability of adopting switching behaviour was dependent on perceived discrimination they experienced from the host society or population. For instance, although some Zainichi Koreans become Japanese citizens through naturalization (giving up Korean nationality), they could still easily engage in switching if they perceived discrimination from their host society or its members. Again, we would like to underscore that switching is a behaviour strategy the present participants experienced in their daily life, not an abstract or intangible concept that exists only in theory.

In extending these results to other societies, if immigrants perceive discrimination from the host society, we cautiously propose that they might employ switching behaviour as a tool to manage two different cultural contexts (Yampolsky, Amiot, & de la Sablonnière, 2016). However, only bicultural people with high levels of integration with both ethnic and host cultures can switch behavioural patterns according to different contexts (Schindler et al., 2016). From a perspective based on the immigrants’ perceived discrimination at the hands of the host society – and given that present-day Japan is oriented toward multiculturalism (Lee, 2011) – if Japanese societies were to implement a multicultural policy of non-discrimination for foreigners in Japan (for instance, in the domains of renting a house or obtaining employment), this would enable foreigners in Japanese societies to live life with a greater sense of security, which would, in turn, produce genuinely bicultural individuals who perceive the ethnic and host culture as compatible. Furthermore, this state of affairs would promote wellbeing and achievement (van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015).

Regarding findings relating to age, Hypothesis 1 (older Zainichi Koreans would experience greater discrimination) was supported. This confirmed previous findings (Fukuoka, 1993). Hypothesis 2, which posited that older Zainichi Koreans are more likely to switch between different cultural contexts, was also supported. The Japanese society in which the older study respondents had lived had championed exclusive homogeneity (Kimura, 2009); this is in contrast to present-day Japan’s relatively positive orientation toward multicultural coexistence (Kim, 2011). In such an assimilationist context, alternating behaviours according to context could be a strategy utilized by older Zainichi Koreans to survive Japanese society’s oppression of the atypical Zainichi Koreans.

We note three limitations to this study. First, regarding the measurement of perceived discrimination, only one item was used. Future research should employ a scale to measure this variable and then confirm the model illustrated in the present study. Second, since the measurement of conflict had a small alpha coefficient, future research should increase the number of items used in this scale and thereby formulate a more robust instrument.

Third, the generalizability of the model drawn from this study to include other foreign permanent residents in Japan remains to be verified. The Japanese government is establishing two kinds of legal status for foreign permanent residents in Japan: general and special permanent residents. As a community of immigrants within Japanese society, Zainichi Koreans belong to the latter category.



## **Conclusion**

In the present study, we articulated the mechanisms underlying switching behaviour, whereby Zainichi Koreans change their behaviour patterns in accordance with shifting situational or cultural contexts and in relation to conflict and discrimination. The model linking perceived discrimination to conflict and thereby to switching fit the sample data better than did the model linking perceived discrimination to switching and then to conflict. This result implies that conflict precedes switching behaviour rather than switching behaviour leading to conflict; furthermore, both conflict and (the resultant) switching may ultimately be caused by discrimination on the part of the host majority society or individuals. We hope that the study's particular finding – that the fundamental sources of switching behaviour are conflict and perceived discrimination – may provide the members of the Japanese host society with a deeper understanding of Zainichi Koreans. We trust that it will also raise awareness and deepen the self-understanding of Zainichi Koreans by aiding them in comprehending what causes behaviour patterns that oscillate between cultural contexts.

Additionally, we hope that it will foster a feeling of shared empathy between ethnic Zainichi Koreans and the host Japanese population. In this way, the two groups could reject the hierarchical relationship of ethnic resident and host and interact with each other on equal terms – a relationship between individuals that extends beyond national boundaries. By fostering such a sociocultural relationship, the incidence of intergroup conflict caused by imbalanced relationships between the ethnic minority and the host majority could see a marked decrease.

## **Acknowledgements**

Portions of this work were supported by a KAKENHI (No 16K13485) Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Switching Scale

1. I conform more to the behaviour of others when I am with Japanese people than when with fellow Koreans.
2. I express my emotions more straightforwardly with fellow Koreans than with Japanese people.
3. I restrain my behaviour to a greater extent with Japanese people than with fellow Koreans.
4. I tend to be more modest and/or humble with Japanese people than with fellow Koreans.
5. I interact in the Japanese style with Japanese people, and in the Korean style with fellow Koreans.
6. My way of interacting with people spontaneously changes depending on whether they are Japanese people or fellow Koreans.
7. I use obscure expressions more often in conversation with Japanese people than with fellow Koreans.
8. I pay attention to manners more with fellow Koreans than with Japanese people.
9. I respect Confucian ways of thinking more when I am with fellow Koreans.

Source: **Switching Scale** (Lee & Tanaka, 2017a)

### Appendix 2: Conflict Scale

1. I do not feel that I can completely identify with either Korean or Japanese ethnicity.
2. I hesitate to do things when the Japanese and Korean ways of doing them differ.
3. I feel that I cannot settle down in Japan or in Korea.
4. I cannot decide whether to live a fully Japanese, Korean, or Zainichi Korean life.

Source: **Conflict Scale** (Lee & Tanaka, 2017b)

**Corresponding author:** JungHui Lee

**Email:** kdukairos@yahoo.co.jp